DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 233 812 PS 013 813

AUTHOR Galda, Lee; Miller, Michael
TITLE The Effect of Dramatic Play on the Story Retellings of Second Grade Children.
PUB DATE Apr 83
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Montreal, Canada, April 11-14, 1983).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Competence; *Dramatic Play; *Elementary School Students; Grade 2; *Language Skills; *Narration; Primary Education
IDENTIFIERS Constructs; Piagetian Theory

ABSTRACT

Effects of dramatic play on children's narrative competence were investigated among 36 second-graders. Children were read a familiar folktale and then "played" the story, discussed it, or drew a picture about it. They were then asked to retell the story either to an informed or to a naive listener. It was hypothesized that (1) more "evaluative" elaborative devices would be found in stories retold to a naive listener than in stories told to an informed listener and (2) more such devices would be found in the retellings of children in the play condition than in the other two conditions. Independent variables were sex, listener, and condition. Dependent variables were number of words, number of evaluative clauses, number of evaluative syntactic devices, and ratios of evaluative devices to number of words. Narrative competence was assessed by measuring the number of evaluative devices present in the retellings, and data were analyzed using a three-way multiple analysis of variance. The finding of no significant effects may be seen as support for Piaget's model of play, in which effects of play decrease in school-age children. The lack of significant results also indicates that narrative competence may not be a unitary construct. Subjects exhibited differences in the cohesive features of their language but not in their use of evaluative markers. It was concluded that various instruments may measure markedly different aspects of narrative competence. (RH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

ED233812

PS 013813

THE EFFECT OF DRAMATIC PLAY ON THE STORY RETELLINGS OF SECOND GRADE CHILDREN

Lee Galda and Michael Miller
University of Georgia

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Lee Galda

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Paper presented at American Educational Research Association
Annual Meeting
Montreal, April, 1983

Theory indicates that there is a strong relation between symbolic play and the development of literacy. Piaget's (1962) model suggests that the opportunity to employ the semiotic function which is offered in symbolic play is a necessary precursor to the development of literacy in young children. This close relation is due to the fact that symbolic play of a dramatic nature and literate behavior share many similarities. For instance, they both require the use of decontextualized language. That is, success in both is partially dependent on the ability to explicitly encode meaning in verbal text. Further, they both involve the ability to encode and comprehend narrative. Dramatic symbolic play involves enacting stories with logical role attributes and event sequences. Telling and comprehending stories also involves coordinating character attributes and temporally and causally sequencing story events. Because of these similarities there have been a number of studies which have empirically investigated the effects of dramatic play on children's narrative competence.

Among these studies are those which examine children's language in pretend play for aspects of narrative competence. Sachs (1980) has described how young children develop complex plots in their pretend play through interaction with adults who "scaffold" the child's play behaviors by providing a "narrative thread" for the child's play actions. Gardner (1980) and Rubin and Wolf (1979) have also noted the development of narrative structure in pretend play. They have documented how children develop the "narrator" role, altering their voices to suit their character roles, and, especially during replica play with props like dolls, "narrating" the action and dialogue of the play episodes. Further, as children grow in their ability to encode more complex plots and character actions they increasingly structure play to include central problems and characters' motivated actions in a temporally sequenced series of events. Central problems, actions, motivations,

and temporal sequencing are all part of a well-developed story schema (Rumelhart, 1975; Stein & Glenn, 1978; Thorndyke, 1977) which is required for the production and comprehension of stories in a school setting. These and studies involving other aspects of narrative competence support that link between dramatic symbolic play and literacy as measured by narrative competence.

Other researchers have attempted to demonstrate a causal connection between those two behaviors, generally by conducting studies which train children in play and then measure their narrative competence in terms of story comprehension. Saltz and his colleagues (one of whom is our discussant Saltz, Dixon, & Johnson, 1977; Saltz & Johnson, 1974) conducted two important studies on the effects of one specific kind of symbolic play. They examined the effects of thematic fantasy play, which involves children enacting fantasy rather than real-world roles and plots, on various cognitive measures. Among other indices, they examined the effects of training in fantasy play on the story comprehension and production of LSES preschool children. They found, generally, that training in play had a significant positive effect on children's story production. That is, children trained in play told longer stories with more connectives and inferences than did children not trained in play. Saltz et al. (1977) argued that the element of fantasy enactment was responsible for their subjects' overall cognitive gains. However, the differences between children trained in fantasy play and those trained in social dramatic play on the story production measure were significant only with above median I.Q. children. Further, adult tuition was confounded with play. Thus the attribution of cause to the fantasy enactment element seemed questionable.

To more clearly identify possible causal elements in the dramatic play--narrative competence relation, and to test the model-generated hypothesis that play would be more effective with younger children than with older children,

Pellegrini (note 1) and Pellegrini and Galda (1982) conducted two studies with LSES primary school-aged children. Following the reading of a familiar folktale, Pellegrini and Galda trained kindergarten, first, and second grade children in one of three conditions: fantasy play, discussion, or drawing. On a criterion-referenced measure of literal and inferential story comprehension there was a significant main effect for condition and grade with a significant condition by grade interaction. Post hoc analyses revealed a significant main effect for condition at kindergarten and first grade but no significant difference among conditions at second grade. Further, a second measure of story and comprehension, number and sequence of events in retellings, yielded significant main effects for condition (play better than discussion and drawing) and grade (second better than kindergarten and first) with no significant interaction. These results generally upheld the model; play was an effective facilitator of story comprehension and most effective with the younger children. One methodological problem in this study was, again the confounding of adult tuition with play. However, in the second study, Pellegrini (Note 1), drawing from the same population, found no significant differences between adult-directed and peer directed-play. A second problem may have been the possibility of ceiling effects on the retelling measure--counting events recalled was perhaps not fine-grained enough.

After the initial analyses were completed Pellegrini (in press), in a follow-up study using the same data, examined the retellings for cohesive features. He found that play did, indeed, help children generate decontextualized oral language and that it was more effective with older (first and second grade) than with younger (kindergarten) children. Therefore, at least for this sample and this measure, the model did not hold.

In an effort to clarify these rather mixed results, the data from the Pellegrini and Galda study were reexamined to determine whether a closer analysis of narrative components in the retellings might reveal some effects

for the play condition at the second grade level. Categories proposed by Labov (Labov, 1972; Labov & Waletzky, 1967) and used in a modified form by Kernan (1977) and Wilson (Note 2) were used. This method of examining narratives involves taking into account the "evaluations" added to the basic narrative framework. Evaluation adds flavor to narratives, emphasizes certain parts as important or exciting, and, in spontaneous oral folk narratives, works to gain and hold a listener's attention (Labov, 1972). Both Labov and Kernan examined spontaneous stories for instances of elaboration and found that, generally, the use of various devices of syntactic elaboration increases with age, Labov documenting increases from adolescents to adults, Kernan increases from second through ninth graders. Wilson analyzed the retellings of a familiar folk tale of third and sixth grade girls and also found an increase in elaborative devices with age.

The data from the present study are different from those in the Labov, Kernan, and Wilson studies. Unlike in the spontaneous narratives in the Labov and Kernan studies, the necessity of gaining and holding the listener's attention and interest was not present in these retellings; children were asked to re-tell the story. However, the request to tell the story to a naive listener should generate the use of some of the elaborative devices present in the original version. Further, since the play condition called for an enactment of many elaborations, e.g. saying What big teeth you have. and walking fearfully up to grandmother's bed, it would seem that those children who played about the story would recall more elaboration in their retellings than would children in the discussion or drawing condition. That is, because of their involvement with the story through play, their retellings would be more "flavorful." Therefore, it was hypothesized that there would be more elaborative devices in stories retold to a naive listener than in stories retold to an informed listener. It was further hypothesized that there would be more elaborative devices in the retellings of children in the play condition than in the other two conditions.

Method

Subjects and Procedures

The 36 subjects in this study were randomly selected from all of the second-grade children in an elementary school in rural northeast Georgia whose population was primarily LSES. Nine groups of four children were formed by random assignment with two boys and two girls in each group. The groups were then assigned to one of three treatment conditions: thematic fantasy play, discussion, or drawing. Each group was trained in its respective condition for two sessions. The third, or criterion, session involved one experimentor reading each group the story Little Red Cap, supervising the play, discussion, or drawing procedure, and then administering the criterion referenced test. After completion of the test two of the four children retold the story to the experimenter who had read them the story (informed listener). The other two children retold the story to the second experimenter who had been absent during the reading of the story (naive listener). Retellings were audio-taped and transcribed.

Measures

The retellings were independently coded by the authors according to the categories of evaluation described by Labov (Labov, 1972; Labov & Waletzky, 1967). Ninety percent agreement was obtained. The discrepancies in coding were discussed until consensus was reached. The categories were: number of evaluative clauses, number of intensifiers, number of comparators, number of correlatives, number of explicatives. Evaluative clauses were defined as those clauses which suspend the action (temporal sequence) in a narrative to emphaisze certain points in the narrative (e.g. "What big teeth you have"). Evaluative syntax included intensifiers, comparators, correlatives, and explicatives. Intensifiers are instances of expressive phonology, quantifiers such as "all" and "very," and repetitions. Because of taping problems expressive

phonology was not considered in this analysis. Comparators include comparatives, superlatives, "like," and "as." Correlatives include appended participles, double attributives, and left-embedded participles. Explicatives are separate clauses appended to main narrative clauses introduced by qualifiers such as "while" and "if" and by conjunctions such as "since" and "when."

Design

The data were analyzed using a three-way MANOVA. The independent variables were sex, listener, and condition. Dependent variables were number of words, number of evaluative clauses, number of evaluative syntactic devices, and the ratios of evaluative devices using number of words as the denominator. And now the recurring nightmare of a researcher presenting a paper: no significant results were obtained. One-way ANOVA's were automatically calculated and indicated significant effects for condition on intensifiers and correlatives but because of the lack of significance in the MANOVA no post hoc analyses were performed.

Discussion

Although it might be argued that the lack of significance may be due to the small sample (36) and the many variables, the results of the MANOVA were not even approaching significance. There was no effect for condition. There are at least two possible reasons for this result.

First, the analytic categories may have been inappropriate to the data. Labov does argue that elaboration is more useful in spontaneous oral narratives than in retellings. However, Wilson did find elaborations in the retellings of her subjects. One possible reason for this is the presence of elaborations in the original text. Folk literature began in the oral tradition. At one point in time they were spontaneous oral narratives and the teller had to gain and hold the attention of the audience just as a modern-day recouteur must. Little Red Cap, as a piece of folk literature, is repete with elaborations.

The enactment of the story necessarily involves encoding many of these elaborations, either gesturally or verbally. However, a retelling of the story does not require elaborations as a simple sequence of events would serve as an adequate recounting of the true narrative clauses in the story. Thus it would seem logical that enacting the story would foreground the elaborated elements of the story more so than would discussing events and characters or drawing pictures, and therefore players' retellings might logically contain more elaborative devices.

A second reason for expecting differences in elaborations in these retellings relates to listener. The informed listener had read the story to the child, therefore the child knew that that person knew the story. The child was told that the naive listener had never heard the story. Thus it seemed likely that the retellings to the naive listener would be richer, including more of the original elaboration. These retellings were marked by significant differences in cohesive devices according to listener (Pellegrini, in press), so the subjects were accommodating their retellings to the difference in listener status in their use of cohesive devices.

A third point regarding the appropriateness of the analysis concerns the age of the subjects. Other studies of the use of elaborative devices have indicated that this use increases with age. The second grade subjects in this study were the same age as the youngest subjects in the Kernan (1977) study, and those subjects used the fewest evaluative devices. However, these other studies were not training studies. That is, the spontaneous or retold narratives were generated without any immediately prior experience with those narratives. Hearing and enacting the story might have helped overcome the age deficiency. Indeed, there were instances of evaluation in almost every retelling.

This leads to the second possible explanation for the lack of significant differences among conditions. It may well be that play is not an effective

facilitator of narrative competence in older children when narrative competence is measured by evaluative devices in story retelling. This would be consistent with Piaget's theory and with the results from the first data analysis. The play condition did generate more explicit language in older children (Pellegrini, in press) but not more elaborated recall.

Finally, these results point to a problem in the whole body of research on the effects of play on narrative competence and that is that the measures of narrative competence employed in a variety of studies are independent across studies and may be measuring different things. The positive lesson I draw from this study is that the ability to generate narrative texts is not a unitary construct. Pronouncements about the effect or lack of effect of play on this ability need to be critically evaluated in terms of the dependent measure employed.